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Desmond FitzGerald; Official With CIA, Dies

Desmond FitzGerald deputy director of operations for the Central Intelligence Agency and policy-maker for all the agency's overseas activities, died of a heart attack yesterday while en route to the Fauquier County Hospital, Warrenton. He was 57.

Mr. FitzGerald collapsed during a tennis match at his country home near The Plains, Va. His home in Washington was at 1671 34th St. NW.

The branch of the CIA he headed collects intelligence in foreign countries and executes various projects.

It is the "working half of the agency's two-pronged effort." The other half, based mostly at headquarters in Langley, Va., analyzes and acts on the information received.

Most persons outside the agency had never heard of Mr. FitzGerald, so little-publicized were his responsibilities and power.

Corporate Lawyer

Mr. FitzGerald has been a corporate lawyer with the New York firm of Spence, Hopkins, Walser, Hotchkiss & Angell, before joining the agency. He was a graduate of Harvard University and its law school. His practice in his native New York prior to World War II was termed "brilliant" by a long-time colleague:

"He was the kind of man who left the practice of law at age 31 to enlist as a private in the Army" because there was a war on, a friend said.

His four years in the Army, mostly in the China-Burma-India theater, gave him his first experience in intelligence work.

After attending the Command and General Staff School, he worked behind enemy lines often, and served as a liaison officer for Chinese troops in the Burma campaign.

Eventually he became operations officer for security for the Chinese Combat Command in Nanking. When he was discharged he held the rank of major and a Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster.

On his return to law practice in New York, Mr. FitzGerald "found it dull," a friend said, in comparison with his Army years. He became active in the American Veterans Committee.

After the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, he joined the CIA. Those years were a time of expansion for the agency, and many of Mr. FitzGerald's friends also came to Washington, many to work for CIA.

"Very Committed"

"He was very committed to the survival of this country in a difficult world," another friend commented.

Fifteen years after Mr. FitzGerald joined CIA, he replaced Richard Helms as deputy director for operations.

When he came to the agency in 1951, he served as a station chief in the Philippine Islands and Japan. Then in 1961, he was made director of Latin American operations in the shuffling that followed the CIA's ill-fated Bay of Pigs operation, an invasion of Castro Cuba by a force of Cuban exiles.

His quick and incisive mind was his most exceptional quality, combined with a courage in making decisions and an honesty and fair-mindedness in dealing with people, colleagues said.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze called Mr. FitzGerald "hardly replaceable . . . he combined a unique balance of dash, courage, care and wisdom."

Mr. FitzGerald leaves his wife, formerly head of the Washington Hearing and Speech Center; two daughters, Frances and Joan; a son, Desmond Jr., and a stepdaughter, Barbara Mary Lawrence.

The family requests that expressions of sympathy be in the form of a contribution to the Hearing and Speech Center, affiliated with Children's Hospital.

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